



THE GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH Georgia Volunteer Health Care Program

What is the Georgia Volunteer Health Care Program?

The Georgia Volunteer Health Care Program (GVHCP) was established in 2005 with the passage of House Bill 166, the "Health Share" Volunteers in Medicine Act". This program provides an avenue for health care professionals to provide donated medical/dental care to the uninsured and low-income residents of Georgia while under the protection of Sovereign Immunity (SI). The program strives to increase access to health care for the medically indigent residents through volunteerism and to increase health care volunteerism through the extension of state-sponsored sovereign immunity protections to providers donating services. As of August 1, 2006, there are 1.7 million residents who have no health insurance.

What is Sovereign Immunity?

The State of Georgia is solely liable for any injury or damage suffered by a patient receiving health care under the provider's Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH) Agreement, as long as the provider works within the scope of his/her professional license.

Why do we have Sovereign Immunity?

The Legislature found that a significant proportion of the residents of this state who are uninsured and low-income or Medicaid eligible are unable to access needed health care because providers fear an increased risk of medical malpractice liability. It is the intent of the Legislature that access to medical/dental care for uninsured residents be improved by providing governmental protection to health care providers who offer donated quality health care services to underserved populations of the state. Therefore, it is the intent of the Legislature to ensure that health care professionals who contract to provide such services as state employees are provided SI protection.

Whom does Sovereign Immunity cover?

Licensed health care providers who contract as "state employees" are provided SI protection as well as the volunteers who complete the department's paperwork. Providers and lay volunteers who donate their time and skills to the GVHCP are afforded the same legal protection as provided to state employees.

What are the eligibility requirements?

Patients seeking treatment must be at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and have no health or dental coverage for services being sought; or must be Medicaid eligible under Georgia law, or be a client of DCH or the Georgia Department of Human Resources whose income is at or below 200 percent of the FPL.

What types of treatment/services are provided?

The health care resources available are totally dependent upon who participates; therefore, services provided vary from organization to organization.

Does the Georgia Volunteer Health Care Program provide prescriptions and/or laboratory services?

No. Prescriptions and laboratory services are not a mandated function of the program. Some clinics and programs may assist a patient with these costs.

Is there any exclusion to an agency/organization sponsoring a clinic?

There are no exclusions. Any clinic/health care provider (faith-based and community organizations, hospital, or individual) can participate in the program as long as they comply with the applicable rules and regulations required in the operation of a medical/dental clinic.

Can retired or out-of-state health care providers volunteer?

Yes. Legislation was enacted to allow certain health care professionals who are retired or licensed in another state the opportunity to obtain a special license in order to volunteer in one of the free clinics. The health care provider needs to contact the appropriate licensing board for instructions and an application.